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C O N F I D E N T I A L VILNIUS 000136

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/NB AND NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [IR](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: IRAN PROTESTS LITHUANIA'S REPRINTING OF MUHAMMAD
CARTOONS

Classified By: Pol/Econ Officer Christian Yarnell
for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (SBU) The Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a diplomatic note from Iran on February 9 protesting the publication in the Lithuanian press of cartoons featuring the Prophet Muhammad. On February 8, Lithuania's infamous daily "Respublika," which has repeatedly printed hateful cartoons mocking Jews and homosexuals, reprinted the cartoons featuring Muhammad that have appeared elsewhere in Europe. The Iranian note protested that "freedom of the press should not be used as a pretext to insult other religions' faiths." MFA Political and EU Department Director Zygimantas Pavilionis told the Ambassador February 9 that the GOL is worried, citing reports that there is a bounty on all newspapers that have printed the cartoons. He expressed fear that "Respublika's" publisher had placed Lithuania in the crosshairs of fanatics who may seek to claim the bounty, but added that the GOL has no specific threat information indicating that its territory could become a target.

12. (SBU) Vaclovas Salkauskas, head of the MFA's Africa and Middle East Division, informed us that the MFA will release a public statement rather than provide a written reply to the Iranians. The response stated that the MFA "expresses its respect for the religious beliefs of every individual, but disapproves of any action against freedom of the press, and therefore rejects charges against Lithuania."

13. (U) The Lithuanian MFA had on February 6 "strongly condemn(ed) the acts of vandalism against Danish and other states' diplomatic representation in Syria and Lebanon." President Valdas Adamkus and Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas have spoken out against the violence, while also calling for media outlets to show more tolerance towards all religious groups. Lithuanian law enforcement institutions are exploring whether "Respublika's" reprinting of the cartoons may have violated laws prohibiting hate speech.

14. (C) The MFA and State Security Department convened a meeting on February 9 to discuss homeland security and the safety of Lithuanian citizens abroad in the wake of the recent violence. Approximately 50 Lithuanian troops serve under Danish command in Iraq, while a 10-man team of Danish soldiers is operating in the Lithuanian-led PRT in Afghanistan. High-ranking Lithuanian military officials Rear Admiral Maciajauskas (Navy Commander) and Brigadier General Pocius (Land Forces Commander) have expressed concerns to us that the reprinting of the cartoons in Lithuania may endanger their troops currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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